



**NANHRI remarks during the International Human Rights Day and the  
25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the South African Human Rights Commission  
By Mr. Gilbert SEBIHOGO, Executive Director**

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**Hon. Deputy Minister of the Justice and Constitutional Development,**

**Hon. Chairperson** of the South African Human Rights Commission Adv. Bongani Majola

**Hon. Representative** of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Representative** of the Constitution Hill and Project Justice Trust

**Representatives** of African NHRIs,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with the deepest gratitude and pleasure that I am addressing this high delegation meeting today when we are commemorating the 72<sup>nd</sup> International Human Rights Day. I thank the South African Human Rights Commission for this invitation, which has allowed a few representatives of African NHRIs to celebrate this day together with you physically.

It is also a special day as we celebrate 25 years of service to humanity by the South African Human Rights Commission, one of the strongest National Human Rights Institutions in Africa.

The Network of African NHRIs- the umbrella body of 46 African NHRIs- and the South African Human Rights Commission have an intertwined history.

One year after the establishment of the SAHRC, African NHRIs met in Yaoundé, Cameroon and adopted the Yaoundé Declaration establishing the Coordinating Committee of African

National Institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, which was formalized into the Network of African NHRIs that you know today.

In 2001, during their Third Biennial Conference, African NHRIs resolved to set up its permanent secretariat and decided that the SAHRC hosts it for an initial period of 3 years until the Secretariat was moved to the Kenya, Nairobi.

Despite this, NANHRI and the SAHRC have enjoyed a close working relationship in all our initiatives. I am pleased to say that in addition to being one of the 21 NHRIs which have enjoyed 'A' status for the longest period for full compliance with the Paris Principles, we have always banked on the SAHRC's support in our undertakings.

I confidently say that the SAHRC has been a pedestal on which we have stood on since formal establishment in 2007 and we are, therefore, proud of you for being the foundation and pillar of the biggest network of NHRIs in the world. Indeed, as per your logo, which bears flames of fire, you have been trailblazers in setting stunning standards on human rights on our continent. That is why we have come along with delegates from some NHRIs in Africa on this learning and exchange visit.

### **Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

On this auspicious occasion that happens when the country is also commemorating the signing into law of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the supreme law seeks to restore equality and equity among the people of South Africa. Under Chapter 9, Article 181 (b) it defines the SAHRC as one of the instruments promoting democracy and good governance.

I make this deliberate reference to the constitution because it is the foundation and backbone of human rights. The human rights chapters of these supreme laws in Africa draw a lot from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, hence the importance of commemorating the day the UDHR was adopted.

Seventy-two years after the adoption of this solemn document by the UN General Assembly, enjoyment of human rights has remained a mirage on the African continent because of blatant disregard of rule of law and disrespect for governance and accountability structures.

This **is so** because constitutionalism is not a priority for some leaders. Some recent waves of conflicts involve changing **or amending** the constitution against the will of the people.

The number of active armed conflicts are smoking lives out of our people, with a sea of others becoming refugees, internally displaced persons every day because of failed governance.

How do we then celebrate when hundreds of thousands of children, women, the elderly and other vulnerable people are weeping because their homes have been turned into battlegrounds in armed conflicts?

How do we celebrate when the fertile lands of **our mother Africa** are drowning in floods of blood as we plant more bodies than crops?

How do we celebrate when our youth are in guerrilla wars and terrorism activities-not fighting the enemy, but fighting themselves or with their government?

How do we celebrate when the young generation is bombing and demolishing **its** future?

How do we celebrate when the cases of gender-based violence have doubled or tripled in some parts of our continent when the world is fighting the biggest pandemic of our time-Covid-19?

As the human rights fraternity, how do we celebrate when the voice of human rights defenders is sniffed out, and they are unable to defend even themselves?

### **Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

I rather call this a time of reflection for us to contribute to a return to constitutionalism, rule of law for us to effectively and sustainably **Silence The Guns** for the **Africa We Want** to blossom.

We meet here today in South Africa because the country has managed to remain peaceful despite its unique challenges, some which are linked to history. The SAHRC has also made great contributions in monitoring, reporting and advising the government through the human rights-mandated organs on the ways of addressing the traditional and emerging human rights issues. This is also true of a number of NHRIs in Africa.

I am aware that taking on government is a toll order, but quoting from one of Africa's greatest son, Nelson Mandela, **It always seems impossible until it is done.**

This, therefore, means despite the shrinking civic space in some parts of our continent, we must contribute to the establishment of transparent, independent governance structures because our fidelity is subject to the Constitution and the rights holders through national, regional and international **instruments**.

**On behalf of the Network of African NHRIs, I wish you all a Happy International Human Rights Day 2020 and a very Happy 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SAHRC**

**Thank you!**